

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **MASTER PLAN PROCESS, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **Introduction**

The Town of Mount Airy has participated in the Comprehensive Planning Process for almost thirty years. In this time period, tremendous growth has occurred in the town in all areas, with residential expansion being the most predominant over time. The Town has matured and grown in terms of its services provided to the growing community and will continue to strive towards meeting the demands of the citizenry.

Growth and maturation nearly always create negative impacts to be experienced by a small town affected widely by surrounding regional development. These negative effects come primarily in the form of increased traffic, increased daily demand on public services and recreational services. Rapid population growth often results in intangible loss perceived as an eroding sense of “community”.

The challenges of growth pressures can be addressed by maintaining a five-year update schedule for the Town Master Plan, looking at land use patterns, transportation improvements and examining the timing and provision of adequate public facilities. These regular plan updates along with the coordination of the peripheral development areas of town with the surrounding county regional plans, assist in guiding the town growth in a manageable manner.

#### **Town Master Plan History**

Mount Airy’s first Town Master Plan was adopted in 1970. This document was subsequently revised in 1973 primarily to address annexations of over 480 acres that increased the Town’s raw acreage by 50% between 1970 and 1973. In 1978, the Town Planning Commission realized that the rate and magnitude of growth, both within and outside the Town boundaries was far outpacing the projections contained in the 1973 Master Plan. With the support and encouragement of the newly created Mt. Airy Civic Association, the Planning Commission completed an update of the Town Master Plan in 1980, with adoption by the Town Council in 1982.

Sound long-range planning policies dictate that the Master Plan be given cursory review on an annual basis and a comprehensive update at least once every five years. Since 1975, the Town Planning Commission has completed an annual review of planning and development related activities, and is now reflected in the Carroll County Annual Report, which are completed in the spring of each year and contain information on all the municipalities within the County.

During the 1980s, the Town again experienced rapid development and approved several large annexations creating a need for an update of the existing Master Plan. In 1989, the Planning Commission began an update of the 1982 Plan. Mount Airy's rapid growth in the 1980s was typical of many towns outside of major metropolitan areas across the country. In many communities, this rapid development has significantly impacted natural resources and threatens to outpace the capacity of utility and infrastructure systems. Mount Airy has done well to avoid many development related problems; however, there is a real concern that the qualities of Mount Airy that attracted new residents are quickly becoming endangered by the development that accommodates this growth.

It is the intent and purpose of this current plan to continue to work towards envisioning a future for Mount Airy that builds on the features of the community and guides development in a way that is beneficial to the Town's citizens and respectful of the environment as was established in the 1994 plan. The proposals in this Master Plan are intended to be a balance of both qualitative issues such as streetscapes and neighborhood character, and quantitative issues such as population growth, zoning and adequate public facilities.

### **Purpose and Definition of the Master Plan**

The Master Plan is intended to serve as a guide for development for the Town for the next twenty years. Although the plan is laid out in a physical sense, it also serves as a reflection of social and economic issues facing the community. There are several basic characteristics of master plans: a plan should address physical growth, it is long range in scope, it is comprehensive in intent, and it is a policy document addressing issues such as rate of community growth, community services and community character. Ultimately, the plan should be seen as a tool for guiding land use decisions that come before the Planning Commission and Town Council on a regular basis.

The plan states broad goals to be achieved over time, normally spanning a period of time from five to twenty years. The time frame master plans are aimed toward feeding into an ultimate "vision" the community deems favorable. Elements of this "vision" are meant to be both tangible and intangible in definition. This future "vision" of the community should be a consensus of the direction the Town's growth will take and that the local citizenry and elected officials have agreed upon.

Once the comprehensive plan is laid out in its "physical" sense, there are several associated planning tools meant to implement the plan. The subdivision regulations, zoning ordinance, landscape ordinance, budget, and capital improvements program are all intended to implement the policies adopted in the master plan as specific regulatory mechanisms. These implementation tools should be examined and updated on a regular basis in order to reflect the latest recommendations constituted by the master plan.

Citizen involvement and participation are considered important elements to the plan update process. Open forum workshops held throughout the plan update process to allow for citizen comment on the draft chapters of the plan. Public hearings on the draft plan also provide essential information for changes adjustments in the text prior to final approval of the document.

### **State Enabling Legislation**

Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland was added to the Maryland Code in 1927. It delegates basic planning and land use regulatory powers to all of the municipalities within the State of Maryland.

Specifically, Article 66B, Section 3.05, explicitly states that “it shall be the function and duty of the commission to make and approve a plan which shall be recommended to the local legislative body for adoption and which shall serve as a guide to public and private actions and decisions to insure the development of public and private property in appropriate relationships and which shall include any areas outside of its boundaries which, in the commissions judgment, bear relation to the planning responsibilities of the commission”.

The code further identifies the minimum elements the plan should contain that address goals and objectives, transportation, land use, community facilities, and sensitive areas. Section 3.06 of the code that discusses plan purpose and vision, “In preparation of the plan, the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth of the jurisdiction, and with due regard to its relation to neighboring territory. The plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing the coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the jurisdiction, and its environs which will, in accordance with present and future needs, ...including among other things, adequate provisions for traffic, the promotion of public safety, adequate provision for light and air, conservation of natural resources, the prevention of environmental pollution, the promotion of healthful and convenient distribution of population, the promotion of good civic design and arrangement, wise and efficient expenditure of public funds, and the adequate provision of public utilities and other public improvements.

The State Annotated Code has been updated to encompass much more in its requirements for certain elements to be included in comprehensive plans. The emphasis in the last five years has been to recognize the value and importance of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and how regional and statewide development affects its long-term health. Emphasis has also been on protection of natural, cultural, and historic resources in order to leave a heritage for future generations of Marylanders. The State law also stresses the importance of the provision of adequate public facilities for all local jurisdictions. Many of these

municipalities do not have in place mechanisms that will enable them to provide those types of facilities in a timely and prudent manner.

### **1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act**

The State Planning Act of 1992 took effect in October of that year and is stated as a general planning policy in the State Annotated Code. The Planning Act is intended to advocate growth in and around existing infrastructure, which specifically indicates established or designated growth area, municipalities, and other areas with development dense enough to support infrastructure system such as major Planned Unit Developments and rehabilitation of existing urban communities.

Smart Growth Areas, designated by the State as Priority Funding Areas, reflect the State of Maryland's intention to support the revitalization of existing communities. This act capitalized on the influence of State expenditures on economic growth and development. The "Priority Funding Areas" are existing communities and other locally designated growth areas consistent with the seven "visions" of the 1992 planning act. These visions act as goals supported by the State to achieve sound planning practices. The intention to focus State spending in these areas will provide the most efficient and effective use of tax dollars and reduce the pressure for sprawl into agricultural and other natural resource areas.

The direct benefit from guiding growth within the areas served by infrastructure improvements is far reaching. The Planning Act encourages responsible development design, overall preservation of environmental resources and other sensitive areas, along with the limitation of sprawling development patterns. The State concern for the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed formed the basis of this legislation and has been looked upon as a proactive and progressive move in the field of long-range planning at the State level.

The Planning Act now sets forth eight "visions" that the counties and municipalities are to adopt and implement through individual comprehensive planning process. These visions are:

1. *Development is Concentrated in Suitable Areas.*
2. *Environmentally Sensitive Areas are protected.*
3. *In Rural Areas, Growth is Directed to Existing Population Centers and Resource Areas are protected.*
4. *Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a Universal Ethic.*
5. *Conservation of Resources, including a reduction in Resource Consumption is practiced.*
6. *To assure the achievement of items (1) through (5) of this section, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined.*

7. *Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county or municipal corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur and;*
8. *Funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these Visions.*

The interpretation and implementation of these visions are left to the local governments so that they may be addressed as appropriately tailored to unique local conditions.

The first vision may summarize the more specific goals of Visions 2-5, and all of the visions are interdependent. By concentrating development in suitable areas the protection of sensitive areas should be achieved. By directing new growth towards existing population centers, undeveloped natural and agricultural resource areas are protected. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay would be achieved through protection of streams, floodplains, steep slopes, forests, and erodible soils, all of which should be considered “sensitive areas”. Lastly, as called for in Vision 5, conservation of resources would be achieved through adoption of all these policies.

It is not enough to simply address these goals through broad land-use policies. Vision 6 identifies the need to further review existing development regulations in order to coordinate the first five visions with an economic policy. As is addressed in this plan, existing zoning and subdivision regulations do not always produce aesthetically pleasing or environmentally responsible development. The complexity of some regulations along with the lengthy development approval process contributes to directing new development to less regulated areas. It is vital that the town and the surrounding counties both commit to and work together in following these eight visions mandated by the State.

The State law strongly encourages the adoption of land development regulations that streamline the development review process. Section 10.01 of the State Code also discusses various regulatory techniques for following through on the principles and practices of the State Planning Legislation. Some of these regulatory mechanisms include, but are not limited to:

- A. The planning, staging or provision of adequate public facilities and affordable housing.
- B. Off-site improvements or dedication of land for public facilities essential for a development.
- C. Moderately priced dwelling unit programs.
- D. Mixed-use developments.
- E. Cluster developments.
- F. Planned Unit developments.
- G. Alternative subdivision requirements that meet minimum performance standards set by the county or municipal corporation and that reduce infrastructure costs.
- H. Floating zones. – (Zones that may overlay other districts).

## I. Incentive and Performance zoning.

This section also states that the locality may choose to adopt other methods to facilitate orderly development and growth and encourage the preservation of natural resources for the provision of affordable housing.

Smart codes and various Smart Growth regulations are available for review at most public libraries and also accessible from the State Department of Planning Office.

### **Statement of Town Goals and Objectives**

Goals and objectives are stated in the introductory chapter of the Master Plan to set the tone for achieving the “ultimate” vision of the Town into the future.

**Goals** are defined as “ultimate desirable ends toward which public programs and actions are directed”.

**Objectives** are defined as “the more specific and immediate needs toward which public programs and actions are directed”. Objectives are more explicit than goals, and wherever possible are stated in terms of obtainable conditions.

**Policy Statements** relate to specific functional areas such as environment, transportation, and public facilities. These are usually stated at the end of each chapter of the plan.

Stated below are the goals and objectives for the Town of Mount Airy.

### **Goal – Better Manage the Effects of Regional Growth on the Town of Mount Airy**

#### *Objectives-*

1. Take a leading role in discussions with all four counties regarding growth management in the Mount Airy Region.
2. Advocate support for county policies that concentrate growth around existing centers, and therefore plan for growth.
3. Pursue opportunities to attract commercial and industrial development to provide a necessary tax base for balanced growth as a regional center.
4. Reach agreements with each county regarding the phasing of growth so that the Town is assured county cooperation with orderly growth.
5. Seek cost-sharing solutions with both Frederick and Carroll Counties for the provision of infrastructure improvements to accommodate future growth.

## **Goal- Mitigate the Impacts of Regional Growth on Town Character**

### *Objectives-*

1. Create identifiable boundaries between municipal and non-municipal areas.
2. Encourage protection of farmland outside the proposed Town limits.
3. Accommodate regional traffic through Town with minimal conflict on local streets, utilizing traffic calming techniques.
4. Work with the State Highway Administration to upgrade State Roads within the Town boundaries.

## **Goal – Preserve and Protect the Town’s Environmental and Cultural Resources**

### *Objectives-*

1. Protect existing naturally sensitive areas from the detrimental effects of development by encouraging sensitive land development.
2. Protect the Town’s groundwater resources.
3. Concentrate development so there is minimal conflict between the man-made and natural environment.
4. Establish land uses that are compatible with designated open space or historic areas.
5. Recognize the value of existing historic structures by providing proper buffering or preservation of immediately surrounding land.
6. Create guidelines for building development that maintain the Town’s historic character.
7. Protect existing streams or tributaries from development by providing adequate physical buffering.

## **Goal – Provide a Quality Living Environment in the Town of Mount Airy**

### *Objectives-*

1. Concentrate commercial land uses in areas that best serve the local and regional market.
2. Provide a variety of high quality residential developments to serve the people moving into Town.
3. Provide for public facilities and services in a timely manner to ensure efficient and orderly development.
4. Encourage neighborhood and community connections by integrating pedestrian networks throughout the Town and create or design for better neighborhood street connections.
5. Provide a coordinated road network based on the needs and patterns of future development.
6. Encourage future development that fosters an attractive visual character and sense of place that is evident in the older more established areas of town.

## **Goal – Encourage and Promote Economic Development in the Town**

### *Objectives-*

1. Encourage tourism by promoting the Town's unique heritage.
2. Encourage the use of State Heritage preservation tax credits along with other financial and technical benefits for property owners in the Town Historic District.
3. Annex land into the Town that can provide jobs locally, such as a professional park.
4. Mount Airy's Economic Development Commission will work with Frederick and Carroll County Economic Development Offices to further encourage economic development within the Town Limits.
5. Continue to attract commercial and light industrial development for balanced growth as a regional center.

### ***The Vision of Mount Airy's Future***

A "Vision" of Mount Airy's future would entail the following Vision Statement;

"To provide a future for Mount Airy that builds on the features of the community and guides development in a way that is beneficial to the Town's citizens and respectful of the environment."

A "Mission" Statement claims the purpose of the Mount Airy Master Plan is to protect the essence of community values and vision, protect and enhance the quality of life and the sense of neighborhood by providing guidelines and standards that ensure:

- 1 -Orderly and balanced growth sensitive to the adjoining and surrounding land uses.
- 2 -Protection of our environmental resources, cultural resources, and groundwater supply.
- 3- Provision of specific infrastructure thresholds, (water, sewer, schools, roads, preservation of the character of the Town) to accommodate long-term growth.
- 4- Establishment of the means to achieve all of the above stated goals.